

# The Ambitious Guest

*Luke 14:7-11*

*With Study Questions*

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# The Ambitious Guest

*Luke 14:7-11*

So He told a parable to those who were invited, when He noted how they chose the best places, saying to them: <sup>8</sup> “When you are invited by anyone to a wedding feast, do not sit down in the best place, lest one more honorable than you be invited by him; <sup>9</sup> and he who invited you and him come and say to you, ‘Give place to this man,’ and then you begin with shame to take the lowest place. <sup>10</sup> But when you are invited, go and sit down in the lowest place, so that when he who invited you comes he may say to you, ‘Friend, go up higher.’ Then you will have glory in the presence of those who sit at the table with you. <sup>11</sup> For whoever exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted.” (Luke 14:7-11).

## Introduction

I recall an episode of Seinfeld where the four stars just found out that George’s fiancée, Susan, had died from licking their toxic wedding invitation envelopes. After receiving the news in the hospital, they looked at each other, not knowing how to respond. One finally suggested they go to the coffee shop (which was their normal routine). The rest agreed and so ended Susan’s character on the show. Life went on and these four remained virtually unaffected by the tragic event.

There are certain things God brings into our lives that should change us; whether it’s the birth of a child or the loss of a loved one. In my own life I can recall certain happy and other unhappy events that altered my heart—carved away at my psyche. I remember, as a teenager, being exposed to exceptional athletes and watching them train, hearing them talk, observing their commitment. They weren’t always a good example, but there was always something to learn.

There is no encounter (if I may use that term) that should so alter us as an encounter with the person of Jesus Christ. To walk away unaffected by Christ is the acme of shortsightedness. In the final analysis, indifference toward Christ becomes impossible. He put it this way:

**Whoever is not with me is against me, and whoever does not gather with me scatters (Matthew 12:30).**

For a time people may appear to endure the claims of Christ, but eventually they will either trust and serve Him or reject and seek to banish any genuine, biblical presentation of His gospel from society.

I open with this introduction because this particular parable follows a miraculous healing of a man by Jesus. That healing along with the attending instruction should have yielded worship and humility in the hearts of His observers, but instead they remain unmoved – shuffling off, seeking seats of honor. Luke remarks on this observation made by Jesus which led to the parable.

**So He told a parable to those who were invited, when He noted how they chose the best places (Luke 14:7)**

All of this, by the way, taking place in the presence of Christ Himself. Certainly for a time they would seek to ignore Christ. Then they would persecute Him. Of course, then He will be their Judge. The entire parable Jesus will tell is found in summary form in Proverbs.

**Do not exalt yourself in the presence of the king, And do not stand in the place of the great;<sup>7</sup> For *it is* better that he say to you, “Come up here,” Than that you should be put lower in the presence of the prince, Whom your eyes have seen (Proverbs 25:6, 7).**

It is the nature of man for him to want to be the principal. And in all the ecumenical dialogue, in all the discussions of tolerance and coexistence, it is logically necessary that someone’s ethical system or life and world view take center stage. We live in a culture (even the Christian element of our culture) that would strongly disagree with these words. But those who disagree must now ask themselves on what basis they disagree. It should take mere seconds of reflection and introspection for them to realize that they want their position to dominate.

The question is not, will one person, one position, one political system, one philosophy, etc. rule. The question is which one? Who truly deserves the seat of honor? And religious systems are not exempt from temptation of self-exaltation. It is to a religious audience that Jesus tells this parable.

**When you are invited by anyone to a wedding feast, do not sit down in the best place, lest one more honorable than you be invited by him;<sup>9</sup> and he who invited you and him come and say to you, 'Give place to this man,' and then you begin with shame to take the lowest place.<sup>10</sup> But when you are invited, go and sit down in the lowest place, so that when he who invited you comes he may say to you, 'Friend, go up higher.' Then you will have glory in the presence of those who sit at the table with you.<sup>11</sup> For whoever exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted (Luke 14:8-11).**

### **Humility and Exaltation**

The parable is not complicated. You might think of a wedding where a guest decides he's important enough to sit with the wedding party or with the family. But then the grandfather walks in and he can't find a seat. The person who invited the guest must then inform him that he has overstepped his boundaries and that he must find a seat elsewhere.

This is contrasted with a guest who sits in the lowest place – in the back of the room. Then the one who invited the guests sees this guest in the humble seat. He walks to the back of the hall and ushers him to a seat of honor.

Although Jesus is surely teaching about more than where someone might sit, it is worth noting that some religious systems still have this clerical caste system. And whether its chairs, robes or tassels, the pomp attending this type of religious hierarchy certainly appears to be at odds with this parable.

The heart of what Jesus is teaching here is found in verse 11:

**For whoever exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted (Luke 14:11).**

Self exaltation is a formidable opponent. Like a shadow it seems to follow us wherever we go. In one respect we want to do our good works to the honor of God and as a good example to others.

**Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven (Matthew 5:16).**

But in the same sermon Jesus taught:

**Take heed that you do not do your charitable deeds before men, to be seen by them. Otherwise you have no reward from your Father in heaven. <sup>2</sup> Therefore, when you do a charitable deed, do not sound a trumpet before you as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, that they may have glory from men (Matthew 6:1, 2).**

Certainly many religious denominations have no chairs, robes or tassels, but prestige becomes a shoulder patch. Pastors, elders, Bible study leaders, etc. begin to believe their own press clippings and a sort of smug and pious arrogance begins to fester. Someone recently told me we shouldn't believe our critics or our dogs.

The word for self-exaltation here (Luke 14:11) literally means to lift up or raise up. It's used by John of Christ.

**And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of Man be lifted up, <sup>15</sup> that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life (John 3:14).**

The root of man's downfall and the ongoing produce of human darkness can be traced to the lifting of self over the lifting of Christ. The issue of pride and humility are not hidden doctrines.

**But he gives more grace. Therefore it says, "God opposes the proud, but gives grace to the humble" (James 4:6).**

**Likewise, you who are younger, be subject to the elders. Clothe yourselves, all of you, with humility toward one another, for “God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble” (1 Peter 5:5).**

**For though the Lord is high, he regards the lowly, but the haughty he knows from afar (Psalm 138:6).**

The battle against human pride is a battle all must continually wage this side of glory. Calvin expressed it thus:

**Humility...must be not only an unfeigned abasement, but a real annihilation of ourselves, proceeding from a thorough knowledge of our own weakness, the entire absence of lofty pretensions, and a conviction that whatever excellence we possess comes from the grace of God alone.<sup>1</sup>**

Along with the warning against self-exaltation comes the precious promise that should not escape our attention – that whoever humbles himself shall be exalted. It is the person who, by the grace of God, dispenses with trust in self and trusts in Christ alone who will be exalted by God.

But does this not seem like a vicious cycle? Humility, it has been said, is the one thing that the moment you think you’ve achieved it, you’ve lost it. There is little doubt that the earnest pursuit of humility is a blessing to the world (perhaps a lesson for politicians and their campaign methodology), the family and certainly the church.

It can just as easily be argued that pride works toward the destruction of all institutions, including the church. How easily and often do conflicts within the church and among Christians take on self-promoting tones. It is within the context of spiritual gifts that Paul writes:

**For I say, through the grace given to me, to everyone who is among you, not to think of *himself* more highly than he ought**

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<sup>1</sup> Calvin, J., & Pringle, W. (2010). *Commentary on a Harmony of the Evangelists Matthew, Mark, and Luke* (Lk 14:11). Bellingham, WA: Logos Research Systems, Inc.

**to think, but to think soberly, as God has dealt to each one a measure of faith (Romans 12:3).**

## **Failing the Test**

Do we not all fail the test of humility? Does it not, like all other commandments, illuminate our hearts to our own sin? This is not an excuse to quit, otherwise we'd quit pursuing all virtue. It is nonetheless a call to remind us of the One whose perfect descent into humility won the great exaltation above all names. As Paul wrote:

**Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus, <sup>6</sup> who, being in the form of God, did not consider it robbery to be equal with God, <sup>7</sup> but made Himself of no reputation, taking the form of a bondservant, *and* coming in the likeness of men. <sup>8</sup> And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself and became obedient to *the point of* death, even the death of the cross. <sup>9</sup> Therefore God also has highly exalted Him and given Him the name which is above every name, <sup>10</sup> that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of those in heaven, and of those on earth, and of those under the earth, <sup>11</sup> and *that* every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ *is* Lord, to the glory of God the Father (Philippians 2:5-11).**

Jesus bore the curse for our pride and graciously grants us the exaltation that we would most assuredly fail to gain. Like a loving husband who bears the execution that belongs to his wife. Though murderous, adulterous and proud, He loves her with a love that proceeds from His own gracious will. The kind of love God has for us and we're called to have for others.

May we, with all our heart, soul, mind and strength seek to walk in humility. To do so is a blessing to us and to others. But may we also have the godly wisdom to recognize the abysmal condition of our pride before the righteous standard of a Holy God. And, as we turn to the Lord's Table this morning – let us eat, drink and remember the victory that is ours because of the grace of God in the cross of Christ.

## Questions for Study

1. Can you recall certain events that have changed your life? What were they and what effect did they have upon you (page 2)?
2. Is indifference toward Christ possible? Explain (pages 2, 3).
3. Is it reasonable for opposing life and world views to be true (pages 3, 4)?
4. Discuss the parable. Can you think of times when you've observed this type of thing take place (pages 4, 5)?
5. What seems to be the heart of Jesus' instruction in this parable (page 5)?
6. What is self-exaltation? Why is it a formidable opponent (pages 5, 6)?
7. What is the precious promise contained in this message (page 6)?
8. What is the vicious cycle between pride and humility (page 6)?
9. How is pride destructive (pages 6, 7)?
10. How do people do in the test of humility? How did Christ do? How does that effect us (page 7)?